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Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 11351

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINT UR
SUBJECT: AMALRIK AND ORLOV ON DISSENT, VOA AND RL

1. SUMMARY. A GENERAL DISCUSSION OF DISSENT IN THE USSR WITH YURIY ORLOV (CHAIRMAN OF THE UNOFFICIAL CSCE MONITORING GROUP) AND ANDREY AMALRIK, SHORTLY BEFORE THE LATTER'S DEPARTURE FROM THE USSR, INCLUDED THEIR ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF VOA AND RADIO LIBERTY (RL) FOR THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT. THEY STRESSED THAT FOREIGN BROADCASTING WAS ESSENTIAL FOR PROVIDING SOVIET LISTENERSWITH FACTS ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOVIET UNION, AND THAT THE CUTTING OFF OF THESE BROADCASTS WOULD BE A CRIPPLING BLOW TO ALL THOSE WORKING FOR CHANGES IN THE SOVIET SYSTEM. HOWEVER, THEY WERE CRITICAL OF VOA'S COVERAGE OF THE CONTEMPORARY SOVIET SCENE AND OF RL'S "SOVIET-LIKE" PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES. ON DISSIDENCE ITSELF, BOTH AMALRIK AND ORLOV THOUGHT THAT SOVIET COMMUNISM PROBABLY WOULD EVENTUALLY "TRIUMPH" OVER THE WEST. THEY FELT THE PROPER ROLE OF THE DISSENT MOVEMENT WAS, IN THE MEANWHILE, TO MAKE SOVIET COMMUNISM AS HUMANE AS POSSIBLE. BOTH THOUGHT THAT THE MOVEMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO GAIN ADHERENTS, PRIMARILY FROM MATURE SOVIETS WHO HAD GRADUALLY BECOME FED UP WITH THE SOVIET SYSTEM. END SUMMARY.

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2. ORLOV SAID HE WAS CONVINCED THAT SOVIET COMMUNISM WOULD

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ENGULF THE WEST, FIRST IN WESTERN EUROPE AND EVENTUALLY IN THE UNITED STATES. SOVIET COMMUNISM'S "SECRET WEAPON" WAS THE WEST'S UNABILITY TO COMPREHEND IT ADEQUATELY. SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY WAS INNATELY AGGRESSIVE AND OUTWARD-THRUSTING, FOR A NUMBER OF COMPLEX REASONS HAVING TO DO AS MUCH WITH RUSSIA'S GEOPOLITICAL POSITION AND HISTORY AS WITH MARXISM-LENINISM. THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WAS MADE UP ESSENTIALLY OF UNPRINCIPLED MACHIAVELLIANS WHO HAD A HIGHLY DEVELOPED SENSE OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS AND ABOVE ALL RESPECTED TOUGHNESS AND POWER. THE WEST SIMPLY WAS INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING THESE "TRUTHS", AND MISTAKENLY THOUGHT THE SOVIET UNION COULD BE DEALT WITH ON THE BASIS OF CIVILIZED RATIONALITY AND LEGALITY. BY THE TIME THE WEST AWAKENED TO HARSH REALITIES, IT WOULD BE TOO LATE. THE ONLY QUESTION WAS: WHAT WILL COMMUNISM BE LIKE AT THE TIME OF ITS TRIUMPH? ORLOV SAID HE HAD BECOME AN ACTIVE DISSIDENT TO DO WHAT WAS POSSIBLE TO MODERATE THE SOVIET SYSTEM FROM WITHIN.

3. AMALRIK ESSENTIALLY AGREED WITH HIS COLLEAGUE, NOTING THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP ACCURATELY REFLECTED THE OUTLOOK OF THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE, WHO AS A RULE DISDAINED WEAKNESS AND RESPECTED POWER. HE SAID HE WAS DEVELOPING A HYPOTHESIS, ABOUT WHICH HE INTENDED TO WRITE WHEN IN THE WEST, THAT THE WEST HAD A GUILT COMPLEX REGARDING ITS FORMER COLONIES IN AFRICA, LATIN AMERICA AND ASIA WHICH FACILITATED THE GROWTH OF SOVIET INFLUENCE IN THE THIRD WORLD AND CORRESPONDINGLY WEAKENED THE WEST. HE SEEMED TO HOLD OUT SOME HOPE THAT THE WEST WOULD COME TO REALIZE THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SOVIET SYSTEM WHILE THERE WAS STILL TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT, AND INDICATED HE WOULD DEVOTE HIMSELF TO STIMULATING THIS "AWAKENING".

4. ASKED ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR NEWCOMERS TO THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT, ORLOV SAID THERE WAS A PROCESS OF RENEWAL, BUT MOST OF THE NEW PARTICIPANTS WERE MIDDLE-AGED. A RECENT EXAMPLE WAS A PHILOSOPHER NAMED ZINOV'YEV WHO HAD LONG HARBORED DISSIDENT FEELINGS BUT BROKE WITH THE SYSTEM WHEN HE WAS ARBITRARILY DENIED PERMISSION TO ATTEND A PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE IN HELSINKI. ANOTHER EXAMPLE WAS THE LINGUIST MEL'CHUK, FOR WHOM THE REGIME'S TREATMENT OF SAKHAROV BECAME INTOLERABLE. IN MANY CASES, DISSIDENTS IN MOSCOW WERE POORLY INFORMED OF DEVELOPMENTS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY.

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5. ORLOV HAD RECENTLY HEARD OF A GROUP OF KOMSOMOL MEMBERS AT KIEV UNIVERSITY WHO ATTEMPTED TO FORM A "POLITICAL PARTY" OF LIBERAL COLORATION. ONE OF THE GROUP TURNED INFORMER; THE PARTICIPANTS WERE DISCIPLINED BY THE UNIVERSITY'S KOMSOMOL ORGANIZATION BUT, SO THE REPORT WENT, NONE WAS OUSTED, AND THE INFORMER WAS DEALT WITH MORE HARSHLY THAN THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS.

6. BOTH AMALRIK AND ORLOV STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN

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RADIO STATIONS FOR DISSIDENTS IN THE USSR. MONOPOLY OVER INFORMATION WAS A PILLAR OF THE REGIME'S STRENGTH, AND IN FACT THE AVERAGE SOVIET "KNEW NOTHING" OUTSIDE OF HIS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. OUR INTERLOCUTORS ENJOYED VOA COVERAGE OF THE AMERICAN SCENE, AND VOA'S MUSIC, BUT FELT VOA'S PROGRAMMING ABOUT THE USSR CONTAINED A LARGE NUMBER OF FACTUAL ERRORS AND MISINTERPRETATIONS. THIS CREATED THE IMPRESSION, ORLOV SAID, THAT VOA DID NOT UNDERSTAND SOVIET REALITY, WHICH IN TURN DIMINISHED VOA'S CREDIBILITY WITH ITS SOVIET AUDIENCE. IN ADDITION, THE QUALITY OF THE LANGUAGE ON VOA WAS OFTEN ARCHAIC AND IN SOME CASES WAS SIMPLY BAD RUSSIAN. ORLOV UNDERTOOK TO DO A WRITTEN ANALYSIS OF WHAT HE CONSIDERED TO BE VOA'S SPECIFIC WEAKNESSES.

7. ON THE OTHER HAND, BOTH AMALRIK AND ORLOV PRAISED THE "OBJECTIVITY" OF THE BBC AND THE HIGH QUALITY OF ITS PROGRAMMING. THE BBC IS DIRECTED AT AN INTELLIGENT AUDIENCE, AS OPPOSED TO VOA, AMALRIK SAID.

8. AMALRIK AND ORLOV COMMENTED THAT ALTHOUGH RL WAS EFFECTIVELY JAMMED IN MOSCOW, IT COULD BE HEARD IN SOME OF THE CITY'S SUBURBS, AND NEWS IT BROADCAST ABOUT THE USSR CIRCULATED QUICKLY. THEY THOUGHT RL'S COVERAGE OF FACTS ABOUT THE USSR WAS EXCELLENT BUT WERE CRITICAL OF RL'S PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES AS BEING TOO SIMILAR TO SOVIET TECHNIQUES. ORLOV FELT THAT SOVIET LISTENERS DID NOT NEED TO BE CONVINCED OF THE USSR'S SHORTCOMINGS BUT ABOVE ALL NEEDED FACTS ABOUT THE TRUE STATE OF AFFAIRS.

9. COMMENT. AMALRIK AND ORLOV ARE WIDELY RESPECTED BY MOST MEMBERS OF THE MOSCOW DISSIDENT COMMUNITY, AND THEIR VIEWS MERIT ATTENTION AS PROBABLY CHARACTERISTIC OF MANY IN THIS COMMUNITY. ORLOV, WHOM HIS FRIENDS DESCRIBE AS "QUIET BUT VERY STRONG", COMES FROM A PEASANT FAMILY, SPENT SEVERAL YEARS AS A FACTORY WORKER PRIOR TO SERVICE IN THE SOVIET ARMY, WHERE HE BECAME AN OFFICER
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AND A PARTY MEMBER. FOLLOWING MILITARY SERVICE, HE STUDIED PHYSICS, SETTLED IN ARMENIA, AND EVENTUALLY WAS ELECTED A CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE ARMENIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES. HE BROKE WITH THE SYSTEM OUT OF FRUSTRATION WITH THE ADMINISTRATION OF SOVIET SCIENCE AND THE SOVIET REGIME IN GENERAL.
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